

was with Goncourt and others, he complained that while he wrote he often fancied he could see mice scampering about him, or birds flying away on one hand or the other. That spring (1875) others also felt "run down," as the saying goes. TourgenefY, for instance, complained of his nerves, and Flaubert was haunted by the idea that there was always somebody behind him while he worked.¹

At last, when the summer came and his book was finished, Zola resolved to seek a change, though not absolute rest, for idleness was repugnant to him. His circumstances had now greatly improved; M. Charpentier had torn up the original agreement for the Rougon-Macquart series, and opened his cash-box, and Zola had at last liquidated the liabilities which he had incurred by the failure of Lacroix. So, with his wife and mother, he betook himself to a little Norman watering-place, St. Aubin-sur-Mer, lying between the mouth of the Orne and the Calvados rocks, and reached, in those days, by coach from Caen. It was there, as Alexis relates, that he planned his next book, "L'Assommoir," the idea of which had occurred to him before his departure from Paris. In his previous volumes he had dealt with the Imperial Court, the Parisian society, the political world, the provincial life, the clerical intrigues of the Second Empire, and it was only in "Le

Yentre de
Paris " that he had cast some side-lights upon
the working
class of the capital. They, however, deserved
an entire
volume to themselves, and Zola felt that he
could write one,
based largely on his own personal knowledge of
their habits
and customs; for in his days of poverty he had
dwelt among
them at Montrouge, and in the Rue St.
Jacques, and again

¹ "Journal des Goncourt," Vol. V, p, 202 (April 25, 1875).